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A
E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

ASSOCIATION,

FOR

DISCOURTENANCING VICE, AND PROMOTING
THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION AND VIRTUE;

IN

ST. ANNE'S CHURCH,

ON THURSDAY 5th MAY, 1796;

BY

REV. WILLIAM MAGEE, A.M. F.T.C.D.

JOSHUA—Chap. xxiv. Part of the 15th Verse.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse ye this day
whom ye will serve—but as for me and my house, we will serve
the Lord.*

D U B L I N :

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1796.

At a General Meeting of the *Association for discountenancing Vice
and promoting the Practice of Religion and Virtue*, held in
St. ANNE's Vestry-Room, 5th May, 1796.

His Excellency JOHN JEFFERIES PRATT, Earl CAMDEN, Lord
Lieutenant of Ireland, President, in the Chair.

It was unanimously Resolved,

On the motion of his Grace the Lord Primate, seconded by
his Grace the Archbishop of Dublin,

That the Thanks of the Association be presented to the
Rev. WILLIAM MAGEE, A. M. F. T. C. D. for his
excellent Sermon preached before them this Day, and that he
be (at his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant's desire) requested
to publish same.



Signed by Order,

JAMES MAXWELL, } Secretaries.
RICHARD WYNNE, }

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

A S S O C I A T I O N,

&c. &c. &c.

JOSHUA—Chap. xxiv. Part of the 15th Verse.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord,
choose ye this day whom ye will serve—but as
for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

*IF it seem evil to serve the Lord!—to serve
that great Being, before whom angels bow,
and in whose presence the highest orders of
seraphic dignities stand dismayed!—evil to
serve the Lord!—evil to serve him, whose
goodness shines through all the wonders of
creation; and whose power, unbounded as it
is, but ministers to the happiness of all his*

B

creatures!

creatures!—And can it to any created being seem evil, to serve this all-mighty, and all-bounteous Master?—Yes, my brethren; strange and unnatural! some there are, to whom such service seems an evil—some there are, who disdain to stoop before the majesty of their Creator; who scorn to accept the riches of his bounty; and to whom it appears a lighter servitude, to drag the chains of sin, than to bear the yoke of their salvation.—That such there are, that such, alas! abound at this day, and in this nation, the occasion of our present assembling sufficiently announces—the existence, and objects of the Association, I am now called on to address, but too manifestly convince it—for, wherefore have you linked together into a firm phalanx in behalf of virtue, but to repel the audacious and overbearing assaults of vice? For what purpose leagued, a sacred band, in defence of religion, but because the giant strides of infidelity have threatened it with instant ruin?—You have associated in support of virtue, in support of your religion, and your God—because the enemies of virtue, of religion, and of God, abound.—Glorious Association! But in the same degree in which *it* is glorious, is the cause

cause of it disgraceful and deplorable—disgraceful, that in a Christian land, you have been compelled to *embody* in defence of Christianity—and deplorable, that you have been arrayed to combat, not only the secret assailant of the Christian faith, but the open blasphemer of the divine administration. With these foes to the morals, and the happiness of man, you have now brought the matter to a fair issue—you have called aloud upon the people of this land, in the words of Joshua—“If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse ye this day whom ye *will* serve;” and you have, all and each of you, been pledged by this grand and awful declaration—“but as for me and my house, *we* will serve the Lord.”——May God grant, that the solemn appeal, which you have thus made, may warn the irreligious from the ruin of his ways—and that the declaration, by which you have thus bound yourselves to the service of your God, may fix you immoveably in the paths of righteousness—“that your light may so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven!”

To animate your efforts in the great cause you have undertaken, shall be the object of the present discourse—and to this end, what can more powerfully conduce, than a fair display—of the *excellence* of that, for which you contend—of the *necessity*, which the present time furnishes for your exertions—and of the *means* most likely to crown those exertions with success?—To these three points then, I solicit your most serious attention.

EXCELLENT indeed, my brethren, is that for which you contend. The blessings of religion, which you labour to secure and to diffuse, are placed far above all worldly valuation. The sentiment, which connects man with an all-powerful superior—which inspires him with the reverence of a secret power, that can explore the deep retreats of thought—and fills his breast, with anxious and humble longings for the approbation of a Being, whose purity will accept no service but that of virtue—can supply the only solid foundation, of private rectitude, and of public prosperity.

That man, whether in his individual or collective state, can rest on this principle alone,

as the source of his truest comforts, and highest perfection—is a truth, which the native feeling of ages the most simple, and the cultured reason, and instructed experience, of nations the most refined, have been found, at all times, most forcibly to inculcate—it has been reserved for an age, vainly professing to enjoy higher degrees of illumination, than any that has preceded, to question its validity, and in a great measure to disclaim its influence—the connexion, then, of the religious sentiment, with the well-being, of individuals, and of communities, it has unhappily become not unnecessary to discuss—nor let such discussion be deemed, on the present occasion, unseasonable. 'Tis true, that your full persuasion on this very head it is, that has induced you, my brethren, to range yourselves thus openly, around the standard of religion—and from the cultivated understandings of my hearers, there is little reason to suppose them unacquainted with any of those arguments, that urge to its defence—yet so great is the importance of this truth, so beneficial must be the effects upon your zeal, from a strong and lively conviction of it, that no enforcement can be unprofitable, no repetition superfluous.—But admitting, that
your

your knowledge require no instructor—that your ardor demand no stimulus—yet surely, the minister of God's word must deem no time unfit, to proclaim this momentous truth, THAT WITHOUT RELIGION, THERE IS NO VIRTUE—WITHOUT VIRTUE, NO HAPPINESS.

To be happy, a man must be satisfied with himself—he must view the past with complacency, and the present with contentment—The different parts of his nature must not be discordant—he must, in short, be *one* uniform and consistent being—acting under the influence of one steady principle, that, by controlling the affections, and directing them to their proper objects, shall secure to the state of the individual, an undisturbed tranquillity. Now whence can be derived this governing principle, that gives the mind a power over itself?—the power that resists self, must be traced to something beyond self.—Like the philosopher, who boasted, that the might of his mechanism could move, even this globe which we inhabit, we require an *external* fulcrum—that great prop, on which the mind can rest, until it has acquired an
energy

energy superior even to itself, can only be Religion. Without this, what shall prevent the anarchy of conflicting passions, or the despotic tyranny of one overbearing, and predominant appetite?—For wherefore sacrifice any pleasure of this world, if for this world alone we live? To what purpose exercise any severities of self-denial, if there is no superintending Being, to whom the sacrifices of virtue are acceptable—nor any state of succeeding felicity, for which they are to prepare?

Shall we say, that the happiness of the present life is best promoted, by controuling the irregularities of appetite, and restraining the excesses of selfishness—and that therefore Reason itself, enforcing the dictates of an enlightened self-interest, furnishes to virtue a sufficient support?—This, indeed, is a principle, that may perhaps operate on the philosophic mind; which, used to contemplate actions in their consequences, can discern distant good, without the diminution of perspective; and whose very habits, have reduced the violence of the fiercer passions; but to the unlettered multitude, or their unreflecting superiors, its effect must be of little value.—Aided
by

by all the power, that religion can superadd, have we not to lament, the insufficiency of its influence? Remove then this great auxiliary—how feeble, how nugatory its operation!—But what, if the corruptions of the human heart shall be seen to prove, this boasted principle of modern refinement, not only inefficient, but untrue—and if we shall find this pillar of philosophic tranquillity, subverted by the very conditions of human existence? “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,” is the language of him, who knows of no life beyond the present—the passing moment, he feels may be the sum of his existence—the pleasure he postpones, may be lost to him for ever—and surely he will not calculate so inconsistently, as to balance the bare possibility of future enjoyment, against the certainty of the present?—No—*every* pleasure that offers itself, will be seized with avidity—each new instance of mortality, will but furnish a stronger impulse to *immediate* gratification—and thus the very warnings, which should reclaim from vice, will become the most powerful incentives, to the unbounded indulgence of every criminal affection.

But,

But, shall we not find in Public Opinion a controlling power—and will not Shame restrain where Reason has proved insufficient?—In answer to this let it be observed, that even granting, that public opinion could reach beyond *public* offences—and that its operation affected, not merely the *act* but the *motive*, there yet remain certain classes, on which it can have little effect.—The two extremes of society, are equally insensible to its influence—the one, shrouded in its obscurity; the other, shielded by its splendor, are alike secure from the intimidation of public censure—and amongst the intermediate ranks, where reputation is admitted to exert its fullest force, shall we not find the rule itself, fashioned by the manners, and consequently transmitting the corruptions of the higher ranks?—Or *should* opinion for some time hold out, against the influence of high example, what will avail its feeble voice, against the clamorous importunity of passion? The hope of secrecy will first encourage—next, example will be sought to justify—and lastly, a bold and hardened defiance will be held out, to all its terrors and restraints.—Thus we find this boasted succour, itself require support.

Let

Let us then advance one step farther—let the force of Law be superadded—the operation of *this*, extending to every rank, and its enforcements to every mind; it is urged, that this will supply, what the former principle wanted, as to universality, or as to coercion—and are we then at last obliged, to fly to an *external* controul?—and do we acknowledge, that the only sure support of virtue, is to be sought in the fear of a superior power—whilst we deny the beneficial operation of the same motive, where its effects are infinitely more important?—Yes, we would place the sceptre in the hand of man, that we may wrest it from the hand of God—the penalties of human law, we readily admit to be indispensable—but those of the divine law, we labour to exclude from our minds, by the intervention of every plea, that a perverted ingenuity can suggest—we discover, that fear is a slavish principle of action; and that obedience from such motive, must be without merit—nay more, we find out that there is nothing to be feared—either the soul is to be consigned to perpetual sleep—or, if reason and nature extort the admission of a future state, we repose on the assurance, that the goodness of the Deity cannot permit, that
any

any of his creatures should be unhappy.—Thus are we determined, at all events, to assert our independence of the Almighty—and thus we satisfy ourselves, that the fear of God is useless as an auxiliary to virtue; whilst we find it unavoidable, to call in the aid of human power to its support.

But let us examine, a little, the strength of this all-sufficient stay—will the force of law subdue the workings of the *mind*? will it reach those passions, that lurk in the retirements of the heart? or will it repress those vices, that confine their noxious influence to the individual? no—suited to the power that framed them, they can be directed, only against such vices, as stand forward in actual commission—and suited to the end at which they aim, they can restrain, only such passions, as war against the public peace—thus the heart remains unaffected; and the passions unimpaired in their force, though limited in their range, are only turned into other channels, in which they may flow, with unimpeded current.

Thus

Thus Interest, Reputation, Laws, are all found insufficient, to the maintenance of virtue—some vices, they may enable us to restrain, and others, they may teach us to conceal—but that great governing power of the mind, that proclaims hostility against all, and that exercises over the passions, a strict and sovereign dominion, must be traced to some higher source. Religion alone it is, that can secure to man this authoritative principle—without *its* saving influence, miserable indeed had been his state—borne headlong by impetuous appetite, and distracted by contending passions, how dreadful the anarchy of the individual, how dismal the chaos of the heart, had not the spirit of God, moved upon its troubled surface, and hushed to rest its jarring elements! Yes, religion alone it is, that can bind these discordant parts, into one consistent system; and by reducing all under the controul, of one steady and powerful force, maintain the stability, and uniformity of virtue—and surely, if such be the power of the religious sentiment in general, it eminently belongs to that pure, and perfect religion, which we enjoy—a religion, which by teaching the sublimest notions of the Deity—by inculcating

ing the great heinousness of sin—and by establishing *beyond doubt*, a future state of retribution, gives to virtue a strength, that is irresistible—and which, unlike the fallacious principles, that worldly wisdom would set up in its stead, extends its influence through all ranks, and conditions of human nature; addressing itself to the peasant, with no less force than to the philosopher; and directing its terrors, with equal justice, against the corruptions of the court, and of the cottage—whilst the jurisdiction of its all-searching tribunal, is not confined to the outward act; but penetrating the inmost recesses of the mind, explores and regulates the most secret movements of thought, and establishes external decorum on the solid basis of internal rectitude.

But whilst many are ready to admit, that virtue is necessary to *individual* happiness—and that for virtue, the only sure foundation is religion—they seem to consider man, in his *collective* state, by no means equally dependent on the same support—as if the happiness of society were something different, from that of the individuals that compose it—or, as if man underwent a total change of constitution, by associating

affociating with his fellow-men—a position involving consequences, so irreconcilable with reason, I should not think it necessary to refute; did not both the theories, and the practice of modern politicians, evince the extensive range of its influence—did we not find, that in the computation of the strength of a people, the virtue of the individuals no longer forms any part of the estimate—and that in calculating the means, by which national prosperity may be advanced, religion is uniformly left out of the account. The wealth, the valour, the public spirit, and due subordination of its subjects, are deemed the bulwark of the state—and in the vigorous administration of salutary laws, the welfare of the community is thought to be permanently secured. Beyond these, the politician looks not—vain, short-sighted man! he looks not to that great, creative, and sustaining power, which alone can produce these; and without which, they cannot possibly continue—for whence, but from frugal industry, from manly temperance, from diffused benevolence, from submissive resignation, and from disinterested patriotism, have these national safeguards been derived? and surely, from no other principle, than

than that, which is confessed to be the source of *individual* virtue, can *these* virtues originate—again; remove that principle, and you will see the very wealth of the state, subverting it by luxury—you will see its valour dissolve into effeminacy—you will see its public spirit degenerate into an ambitious conflict for power—its subordination unhinged by licentiousness—and its laws perverted and depraved, as well by the rapacity of those who are to govern, as by the turbulence of those who should obey.

The WEALTH of the state—must it not be supported by extensive commerce, and multiplied manufactures? and are not these, without the corrective of religion, the unfailing corrupters of national morals? will not the same gales, that waft to our shores, the produce of distant countries, carry to us their luxuries, and their vices? and will not the collected numbers, that are promiscuously crowded together for the purposes of manufacture, engender a contagion, not less fatal to the morals, than that which their unwholesome haunts daily send forth, is found to be to the health, of the lower classes of the community?

But

But it is not from the *sources* of national wealth alone, that its corruptions are to be feared; affluence in the higher ranks, will beget extravagance—extravagance will be followed by want—and in the struggle to support former state, and to indulge in habitual vanities, all means however base, will be resorted to,—until at length, a total profligacy succeed, and sweep away in its impetuous current, every remnant of principle, and virtue—nor will the mischief rest here—the example will descend—until the general taste for pleasure and dissipation, having ranged with wasteful step, through the intermediate classes, shall at length strip even the artizan of his industry; and robbing his family, of their natural support, leave his helpless offspring, if not to perish, to grow up in idleness, ignorance and vice, for the disturbance, perhaps for the destruction of society—amidst this general dissoluteness of manners, all generous ardour, and manly spirit must melt away—pleasure will effeminate, and intemperance consume, the energies of the nation—until the enfeebled victim, shall at length sink under its own corruptions, or fall an unresisting prey to the attacks of the first warlike invader.

But

But *should* even the Valour of the people rise superior to these enervating causes, are we to look to *this*, as the bulwark of national prosperity? Surely war will not be ranked amongst the means of national welfare—nor can increased dominion (the only acquisition of military achievements) be considered an additional security.—If men are corrupt, by widening the sphere of empire, we only multiply the means of mutual corruption—and in the extension of conquest, we lay a sure foundation for the perpetuity of the calamities of war. Besides, what shall protect the state itself against the instrument of its victories? May not the great engine of national carnage be turned against its employer? And has not experience abundantly evinced, that in periods of general licentiousness, and popular depravity, no reliance is to be placed on the fidelity of armies?

Again—shall we find in PUBLIC SPIRIT a sufficient safeguard?—That there exists, between the public good and the welfare of the individual, an indissoluble connexion, cannot be denied—but were this connexion even obviously discernible, the abstract contemplation of it

would but ill serve, as a rule, or as a motive. Will the unlearned *see*, or the unprincipled *feel* the public interest, so as to be regulated by its dictates? The individual will, in many cases, be unable to trace the pressure, which bears upon *him*, to the general principle, whose operation overbalances partial inconvenience by public benefit—or if he should in every case connect it with its true cause, of what avail is this without religion? Why should he, who acknowledges no God but self, contribute to the general good, at the expence of personal enjoyment? What is public spirit without private virtue? What *can* it be? Surely, nothing but vanity or ambition. Would that vanity, or disappoint that ambition; and you will see the *patriot* of to-day, become the *incendiary* of to-morrow—the public good, lost in the contemplation of his own fancied wrongs—and the torch of discord, and rebellion, lighted up from the flames of his private resentment—every day's experience convinces us all of this—nor indeed can it be otherwise—for what is patriotism, but the principle of rectitude moving in a larger sphere? What, but the wider diffusion of the charities of private life?—Without virtue, there is no rectitude

tude—without religion, there are no charities—the selfish principle alone can guide him, who is destitute of virtue—and a Patriot without religion can feel no interest in the welfare of his country, farther than as it is connected with his own personal advantage.

Again—though Wealth, Valour and Public spirit are found insufficient, will not the power of Government supply every deficiency—and binding together the great fabric of civil society, secure it from dissolution?—equally insufficient will this be found, if the morals of the people be corrupted—the internal principle of dissolution is at work, and no human contrivance can stop the progress of its ruinous operation—for first, how shall Government itself subsist? It will not be said, by force.—Despotic power, at all times unsafe, is in the present state of things, impossible—men know too well their collective powers, to be compelled to slavery in the mass;—but could even despotism maintain its usurpations, surely a system that subjects by debasing, and tranquillizes by crushing every human energy, will not be contended for, on the ground of national prosperity.

Since then, by force alone governments cannot subsist, what remains for their support, but the principle of subordination? This indeed is the true cement of civil union—but without religion, whence is this to arise?—Since such is the condition of human affairs, that the greater part of mankind must be reduced to toil, for the necessary support of existence; whilst they see all the luxuries, and, as *they* think, the blessings of life, heaped profusely upon their superiors, without any effort for their acquisition; and can discern no difference between themselves and those favourites of fortune, save what arises from the accidental circumstance of birth—what is to teach the poor man, acquiescence in his lot? what is there, to induce him, to pay a *willing* submission to those laws, that seem to place a barrier between him and happiness—and to contribute to the support of that system, which, whilst it secures to others all the pleasures of the world, has nothing in reserve for him, but hardship and misfortune?—The philosophy of the peasant will not reach to the discovery, that this partial pressure is general good—nor will his patriotism find, in this reflexion, a sufficient consolation for the suffer-
ings

ings he endures.—Let not the politician rashly say, that his *willingness* to submit is of little moment, since that submission may be compelled—let him reflect, that in the mass of the people there is a principle, that though it may be for a while kept under, can never be totally subdued—it may be pent up by the force of compression, but it will at some time undoubtedly break forth, with a violence proportioned to the restraint—let then this truth never be forgotten, that no government can be secure that is not exercised over a *willing* people.

But we shall be told, that the pure administration of equitable laws will ensure an unconstrained obedience.—Little will avail all human laws, if not sustained by national morality—why should they, who are *at war* with virtue, submit to laws framed for its support?—the laws themselves, if friendly to morals, will furnish *occasion* for discontent, and resistance—and the very means, which in a virtuous community would have secured tranquillity, will to a corrupt people, prove the source of discord, and commotion.—Thus we find that laws *pre-suppose* virtue, where they profess to befriend it—and that they must ultimately rest upon

upon that very principle, the want of which it is pretended they can supply.

But, granting that the laws possess sufficient power to secure subordination, what shall guard us against the laws themselves?—Since both to frame, and to execute them, can belong but to a few; if there be not virtue to restrain the love of power, to what are we to look for protection, from their corrupt enactment, or their oppressive administration?—Nay more, conceding the utmost that can possibly be required—that on the part of the governors, laws will be wisely framed, and impartially administered; and on the part of the people, willingly and readily obeyed—not to object, that there are many and heinous offences, that cannot possibly come within the circle of their jurisdiction, being beyond the power of man, with strictness to define, or with certainty to discover—we shall yet find their boasted influence, even in that, which they claim as their peculiar province—the punishment of open crimes—entirely nugatory, if not sustained by the religious principle—for is it not on *testimony*, that the efficacy of laws must *ultimately* depend?—remove then the religion of an oath, and what

what protection is there for the good, what punishment for the wicked?—Will the Atheist respect an appeal to that Being, whose existence he denies?—Or will he, who lives only to *himself*, scruple to sacrifice the property, or even the life of another, to that which he deems his final good?

But in fact, for a society of *Atheists* to exist, is impossible.—Without a God, there is no conscience—without conscience, the only duty is self-gratification—social virtue of every kind vanishes—nothing remains, on which mutual reliance can be built—all must be done, in compliance with external power—and every law will be disregarded, when it may be done with secrecy or impunity—and present pleasure or profit tempts to the violation.—Let the Atheist produce a single instance, of any one nation, in any period, subsisting without religion, and then it may be admitted, that religion is not necessary to the existence of a state—if he find the annals of history unstained by such an instance, let him then account for so extraordinary a phenomenon in the moral world, as this—that from the creation to the present moment,
every

every society of men has been under a gross delusion, in a matter affecting their most important interests—and we shall be content, to let the glory of his superior wisdom, rise triumphant on the ruins of all antient opinions.—If he assign political contrivance, as the cause of the universality of the religious principle, let him consider what he allows us—that the religious principle has been *deemed* by all politicians and legislators, the only sure bond of civil union—and also, that it finds in the mind of man, something so *congenial to its nature*, that it has been in the power of legislators and politicians, to make it a matter of universal adoption—thus then the two great points, on which we build, are given up—that Religion is *necessary* to civil society—and that it has its *foundation*, in the natural reason, and sentiments of man—and from this it follows, that the Atheist not only declares himself at war with reason and nature; but is, by his own confession, a determined foe to government, and to society.

Nor can he avoid the force of this inference, by the few instances that may possibly be found, of those, who, rejecting all religion,
have

have yet conducted themselves as good moral characters—for it should be remembered, that such, though *now* they disclaim its influence, had, at an age susceptible of permanent impressions, received the tincture of religious principles; which, though themselves discarded, have left behind them habits, favourable to virtue.—Besides, whilst religion is professed by the community at large, and the moral duties consequently held in general estimation, the force of opinion, aided by the vanity and zeal, which usually accompany the profession of a new system, will lead to the observance of the latter, where all regard for the former has been thrown off—so that, on the whole, the blameless morality of such persons furnishes a proof, not of the inutility, but of the indirect influence, of religion—this, then, is *not* an example suited to the case—no—let an instance be produced of the *entire* body of a people, *destitute* of the religious principle, and regularly trained up in the *disbelief* of a God, and we shall have a fair ground for decision.

One unhappy experiment, indeed, *has* been made, to exhibit this melancholy example—
what

what has been its effect? We have seen a nation, discharged of every moral feeling, and abandoned to every species of impiety, labouring to throw off a sentiment, which could only serve to give pain from its continual violation—we have seen these efforts, aided by all the force, that the example and the power of its impious rulers could bestow—and we have seen them, whilst cursed with a momentary success, bring forth atrocities, more horrid than the page of history can produce—and again, have we not seen this wretched people, whose refuge was Atheism, and whose best hope was annihilation, overwhelmed by the force of nature, and yielding to the voice of reason? And do we not now behold those, who direct the affairs of that ill-fated country, labouring to build up that very system, which their predecessors had gloried to overturn?—Now let it be remarked—that whilst the object of those, who swayed the public opinion, was to subvert established order, and excite to furious outrage—so long Atheism was made the boast of the legislature, and the fashion of the multitude—but when a *settled system* of civil regulation was to be adopted, religion was instantly called in—the belief in a God and his
super-

superintending Providence, solemnly announced—and the dark sleep of death, made to retire before the dawn of an eternal existence.— Thus then, even from those, whose testimony in favour of religion cannot be questioned, on the ground of superstitious attachment to its interests, we have received this instructive lesson—that if we would disturb all order, and disband society, religion must be discarded—and that on the contrary, if government is to be established, and social happiness secured, to that saving principle alone must we look for effectual aid.

If then from the whole it be an obvious result—that religion is necessary to civil society—that, without it, neither the comforts, nor even the existence of the social state can be preserved—it needs little argument to shew, that the more *pure* that religion is, the more the happiness of the community, as well as of the individual, must be advanced—try this by experience—amongst the nations of antiquity, do we not uniformly find their prosperity keeping pace with their morality, and their morality commensurate with their religion?— But I will not detain you, with the particulars
of

of an induction so obtrusive—every page of antient history proclaims the fact—and if we find this to have been the case, even amidst the wild superstitions, and perverted morals of the heathen; what should we not expect, from the sublime doctrines, and refined morality of the gospel?—from a religion, which not only affords to *individual* virtue the most powerful support, but enforces with peculiar energy those qualities, that sustain the *social* system.

In vain, does the corrupt sophistry of the Deist object to this beneficent dispensation—that it has been the occasion of war, and persecution—that its precepts are inconsistent with civil liberty—and that those virtues, with which it professes to adorn the Christian character, it has been found ineffectual to secure.—To charge upon Christianity the faults and crimes of those, that have usurped its name, is the only resource, that remains to its enemies, when they can find nothing in the religion itself, on which to fasten condemnation—but it requires uncommon hardihood, to impute the ferocities of war, and the cruelties of persecution, to a system, whose very essence

is

is benevolence—whose distinguishing features are humanity, gentleness, long-suffering, kindness, brotherly love—and whose glory it is, to have extended, even to foes and oppressors, those kindly affections, which the utmost stretch of heathen morality could not carry beyond the friend, and the benefactor—the objection, then, that would fix upon the benignant principles of Christ's holy religion, the vindictive malignities of some of its professors, involves a confusion too clumsy, to pass even on the most unthinking.

Of equal force is the argument, that would pronounce Christianity injurious to Freedom.—Patriotism, indeed, has not been formally announced, in the catalogue of Christian virtues—and the language of the gospel has declared peaceful submission to the powers that be—a Christian duty—but the same gospel has enforced a benevolence, embracing all the charities of social life; and has enjoined to governors, a mild and equitable exercise of power, as implied in the precept, and corresponding to the duty, of unresisting obedience—how, then, can that be called hostile to liberty, which mediates between the People and the
Ruler

Ruler—which generates on the one hand, subordination and tranquillity ; and on the other, justice and moderation—which resists no rational and peaceful means, of securing the just rights of the subject—and which, whilst it strengthens the ties of allegiance, and encreases the public stock of virtue, diminishes the jealousy of power—and guarding freedom against the abuses of licentiousness, renders those restraints unnecessary, which a *corrupt* people require for their controul ?

But again, it is urged, that the advantages of Christianity, with regard to individual virtue, have been much overrated—and that in the Christian world, vice and immorality are still found to prevail.—Now I will only ask, whether where this immorality is found to prevail, there does not prevail *irreligion* also—and whether the man, who indulges in habitual vice, has not in the first instance, released his conscience from a sense of Christian obligation ?—What *denomination* he may wear, is of little moment—the man, who violates the precepts of Christianity, is *not* a Christian—and to object *his* vices, to the religion which he rejects, is a species of reasoning well suited to those, who

who resist the cause of virtue, and of truth—the *value* of the religion is to be judged of by its natural tendency, and by its actual effect upon those, who are governed by its influence—that even in countries where Christianity is professed, there are many, to whom that influence has not extended, can furnish no argument against a system, which works not by physical compulsion.

But let not the infidel triumph in the inefficacy of the gospel—let him consider, that the multitudes which it *silently* leads to piety and goodness, are unobtrusive, and unknown—and that many even of those, who disgrace the Christian name, may possibly have been kept back from greater enormities, by the restraints, which Christianity may have wrought into their early habits, or which it may indirectly impose through the medium of society—but that, after every possible allowance, the number of those, who live in opposition to the Christian precepts, is great—that the influence of religion upon our hearts and lives, is at this day considerably reduced, must unhappily be confessed—but what do I infer?—

that

that the friends of virtue and religion should exert themselves the more.

Yes, my brethren, the present times do *indeed* call for your exertions—the decline of Christianity—the decline of religion—the decline of morals—the threatened ruin of your country—all demand your most strenuous efforts.—That Christianity—religion—and morals *have* declined, each day's observation furnishes proof in melancholy abundance—for whence the desertion of our churches—the disregard, and violation of the sabbath—the neglect, and ridicule of Christian duties—the eager reception of all works, calculated to depreciate, and traduce the Christian faith—the gross abuse of oaths—the perversion, and defiance of public opinion—the universal rage of dissipation—the unbounded pursuit of pleasure—the contempt, and hatred of all authority—the rapid decrease of modesty, and chastity, amongst our females—the extravagant profusion of all ranks—begetting in the highest—embarrassment, venality, meanness, profligacy—in the middle orders—bankruptcy, indigence, family distress—and in the lowest class—idleness, debauchery, violence, disregard
of

of law, impatience of controul, insurrection, massacre.

I know, that at all times the moralist and the preacher have deplored and condemned, the vices of their cotemporaries, as exceeding those of former ages, whilst in many cases they only borrowed from the nearer view an artificial magnitude—but on enquiry, I fear it will be found, that this picture, dismal as it is, merits not the charge of exaggeration—for look abroad and see what is the real state of things.

As to religion, look even to its *externals*—in what manner do we find the worship of that great Being, who made heaven and earth, conducted?—do we not see that day peculiarly allotted to the glorifying of his name consumed by the lower ranks, in gross intemperance, and blasphemy and riot—whilst amongst the higher, no longer able to excite even a weariness of its dull uniformity, have we not seen a liberalizing fashion strip it of its sanctity, and extend to it all the customary modes of pleasurable indulgence?—not content with exploding the old-fashioned notion, that the

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public

public worship of the most High should be attended with regularity, and engaged in with reverence, do we not see it sending forth a more than usual display of vanity, and unfolding a more laborious magnificence ; as if to ridicule the humble votary of the temple, and to disgrace the festival of God's hallowed rest ?—and with those who would be ranked amongst the more refined, do we not see the evening of this sacred day conclude, with all the usual round of dissipation—to the scandal of religion, to the prejudice of those whom their example may corrupt, and to the actual hindrance of every member of their household from the discharge of any of the pious duties of the day ? Nay more—lest the abuses of God's sabbath should not be sufficiently pernicious, if confined within the privacy of their dwellings, have we not seen a public entertainment set apart for its peculiar use ?—thus openly proclaiming hostilities against the sabbath, and calling in the multitude to share in the profanation of the triumph.—On this last act of profligacy I am unwilling to dwell—it is difficult to speak of such abominations with the moderation suited to this place.—I shall therefore only beg to remind those, on whom
this

this establishment may depend for patronage and support—that if there be any *one* species of impiety, by which the very *notion* of religion may be clean wiped from the minds of an entire people, it is that of an *habitual violation and contempt of the sabbath*—and if there be any *one* scheme, by which this may be completely effected, it is by an Institution, which appoints a public entertainment for the regular returns of the sabbath—which stamps that entertainment with the sanction of distinguished names—and which spreads round it all the attractive splendor of affluence and fashion—whilst the pretended harmlessness of the objects of the meeting are made to cheat timidity of its scruples, and the plea of charity held out as a compromise to conscience,—a plea ill-becoming those that overlook a fund, which *obviously* presents itself; and which connects the cause of humanity with the worship and glory of the Creator——and are we to wonder if after such examples we should find, that amongst the lower classes of our people, this day which was given for rest, is turned to riot—that each return of it is celebrated, as a bacchanalian festival—and that the interval which it affords from worldly occupa-

tions, for the purpose of impressing the seriousness of religious feeling, is employed for the sole end of violating every religious precept, and promoting every species of disorder and immorality?

When the worship, and consequently the reverence, of the Supreme Being has been thus generally laid aside, we might naturally expect to find amongst the many melancholy effects that follow, that even the last solemn appeal to divine omniscience should cease to be respected—and that the obligation of an oath should, in a great measure, have lost its force—and is not this the case?—Do we not see it, day after day, bartered by the necessities of one class, and bent to the convenience of another?—administered without ceremony, and taken without consideration, do we not find it frequently employed as an idle pageant to qualify for office, or as a destructive weapon suited to the basest purposes of rapacity or malice? Look to those struggles of ambition, which each returning period of delegation brings upon a land, more tenacious of liberty than virtue—what are they but great convulsions of the moral system—by which
every

every principle of truth is torn up by the roots—whilst the treasures of the rich are every where employed, to create and purchase the perjuries of the poor?—Nay, look even to those courts, in which the venerable form of justice is seen to preside—how is the solemnity of an oath trifled with and abused? Even in that place, where this awful appeal to the eternal Judge is made the security of life, reputation, liberty—of all that is dear to man—with what disgraceful levity do we too often find it treated? What ingenuity do we see employed to colour the falsehoods of subornation—and to confound the honest simplicity of truth into inconsistency?—and are we then after all this to wonder, if the very *notion* of truth be not amongst the conceptions of our poor? Are we to wonder, if we find the promise of the tradesman, but the pledge of our disappointment—and the confidence reposed in the domestic, repaid with the pillage of his master? Are we to wonder, if we find fidelity in private life, and allegiance in public, scoffed at as empty names—and if the *only* covenant to which the lower classes of our people are found not unfaithful, is a COVENANT OF BLOOD?—a covenant, which binds them to
carry

carry terror and desolation through the land—and with embodied outrage to menace even the venerable fabric of our constitution.

Here opens one of the dreadful consequences of that irreligion, which has long been creeping unperceived, but now lifts its head and stalks abroad in ghastly triumph.—When the great one of this world ridiculed in theory, and by his practice insulted the fantimonious duties of religion, he was not aware that the contagion of his example would rapidly descend—he was not aware, that the restraints of religion must appear sufficiently burdensome to those, on whom they imposed a patient submission to the hardships of poverty—and that little encouragement was wanting to induce them to throw them off—he was not aware, that in shaking the authority of religion, he was undermining the very foundation on which *he* stood—let him now look round, and survey the fruits of his achievements—he thought, perhaps, if he thought at all, that the operation of moral causes was slow—and with the philanthropy suited to his principles, consoled himself with the reflection, that things

things would last *his* time;* and, that he need not fear to contribute, by his vicious indulgences, to the swelling of a storm, which was to burst on the head of *posterity*—but let him now ponder the awful lesson, of irreligious example striking instantaneous root, and suddenly shooting up in savage outrage and national convulsion—let him behold an infuriate populace arming for the destruction of their country—and whilst the grand scheme of political subversion has been maturing by secret and systematic combination, and awaiting its completion by the infusion of a foreign force, let him behold the genius of insurrection, mean-time, impatient of delay, breaking forth in acts of violence and carnage—the laws resisted and defied—and the strength of government challenged to open conflict—let him also behold the new monster, assassination, coolly dealing out its havoc, and aiming its poniard, one time against the active vindicator of his own and his country's rights, and at another, against

* “After *us* the Deluge”—had been a phrase of familiar consolation amongst those whose vices concurred with the principles of a destructive philosophy, to draw down ruin upon a neighbouring country—on the awful anticipation of this *reversion*, it may not be unwise to reflect.

the suspected partner of the dangerous secret—and let him, whilst he is made to tremble for his very existence; and whilst he is compelled to convert his house into a fortress, and to exchange the comforts of domestic tranquillity, for the terrors of intestine commotion—let him, I say, reflect upon the just judgments of that Providence, which has thus visited him with the consequences of *his* impiety—let him reflect, that *he* it was, who had provided the instruments for sedition—that, in preparing the minds of the people, for the willing and ready admission of those doctrines of treason and rebellion, that have been lately circulated, with a success to be equalled only by the zeal of their propagation—*he* it was, who had pointed the dagger, that the unnatural assassin of his country has aimed at her existence.—The deadly blow has been, indeed, averted by the wise and vigilant exertions of our governors—but let him not thence conclude all danger past—the wisdom and the strength of man will avail nothing against the counsels of the Almighty—and the scourge of our iniquities, though for a time withheld in mercy, will, if that mercy be slighted, return with tenfold vengeance.

Let

Let me then implore *even* those, who can estimate religion only by its temporal effects, to awake *at length* to the consequences of its dereliction, and to unite with the friends of virtue in stemming the torrent of public immorality—if they can *yet* remain so blind, as not to see that the destruction of social order is the natural product of national irreligion, let me entreat them to turn their eyes to the professed opponents of government and subordination, and observe in what manner they execute their schemes of *subversion*—whether it be not their plan, to sow the seed of insurrection by scattering the principles of infidelity—and whether they do not make regular preparation for overturning allegiance to the *magistrate*, by stripping men of allegiance to *their God*?

For what has been the fact? Have we not seen, for some time past, a *regular, systematic* diffusion of Atheism through the land—societies deliberately formed for the purpose—their united talents and treasures *charitably* employed, to reduce the abstruseness, and the bulk of antient blasphemies, within the apprehension and the purchase of the multitude—
—and

—and thus, a system of diabolical *retail* (as it were) established, by which even a penny-worth of Atheism is ready prepared for the poor—the very infant furnished with his primer of infidelity—and the mendicant enabled to pick up the poisoned morsel on the highway. And by whom has been conducted, this process of *modern illumination*? Is it not by the very persons, who have been labouring to disturb the public peace, and to overturn the constitution? They knew too well, that religion is the only basis of social order—they had seen the *same* methods successful in a late unhappy instance—and they naturally looked for the same consequences—that the same consequences have *not* followed, demands our fervent gratitude to the gracious Disposer of events; who by bringing to light their wicked counsels, and prospering the salutary endeavours of our political protectors, has reserved us yet for farther trial—and enabled us, if we will, to return to his righteousness, and be saved.

But although these enemies of human happiness have failed, in accomplishing the *whole* of their destructive purpose, it is dreadful to think

think how far they have been able to advance. To be released at once from the fear of God and man—to open wide the door, to the indulgence of the worst, and most violent passions of our nature—to unrein licentiousness—and to hold out to the meanest, the sudden acquisition of unbounded wealth and power, carry with them charms not to be resisted—and treason and impiety have accordingly been found to spread around their baneful influence—here, then, my brethren, is a field *indeed* for your exertions—when irreligion, hitherto confined to the palaces of voluptuous opulence, or the closets of lettered scepticism, has found its way even into the cottage of the peasant—it is full time, I say, for *you*, who know the comfort of God's holy word, and the ruin that must arise from its rejection, to put forth your best, and most strenuous efforts—and when this spirit of irreligion has carried in its train, the spirit of insurrection, and all its fiend-like attendants; it is full time for *all*, who regard the blessings of society, and the existence of our political establishment, to unite with you, in rooting up this parent stock of every evil that can afflict the human race.

When

When the impieties, that are usually nurtured on the rich heights of affluence, are found to have spread even through the lowest ranks, the depravation of society must, indeed, be alarming—and yet I know not, whether another more deadly symptom does not remain to be noticed—I know not whether the encreasing dissipation, and unprincipled pursuit of pleasure, amongst the FEMALE part of the community; and which, no longer confined to the highest class, have reached deep into the middle rank, do not furnish a proof, yet more deplorably convincing, of the degraded state of religion, and manners, in the land—but if any delicacy remains to the public mind, let me not wound it, by a review of the enormities, which this subject necessarily suggests—here then let me draw the veil—but thus much it is unavoidable to remark—that if ever the women of any country, shall become so far vicious, as to have thrown off all restraints of religion, and decorum—and shall be able to turn the scale of fashion in their favour, so as to glory in their shame, and triumph in their dishonour—the fate of that country is decided—the descent to vice is no longer gradual—the fences of virtue are every where borne down
by

by a sweeping and resistless torrent—and the land is deluged with abominations. The recent example of a neighbouring country has evinced the necessity of these consequences—it behoves us seriously to consider, how far we, of this nation, deserve to be secured from a similar catastrophe.

Alas! my brethren, it is alarming, to reflect upon those vicious practices, that disgrace every rank, and description of the community—it is alarming, to reflect upon that dissoluteness, and dissipation, which have nearly extinguished every moral, and religious feeling; and in which we fearlessly indulge, whilst we hang over the verge of a frightful precipice, which foreign and domestic enemies have prepared for our destruction.—Dreadful infatuation! when the judgments of the Lord are abroad upon the earth—when the visitations of an insulted God, are seen levelling the lofty mockers of his might—when the finger of desolation is beheld, tracing in characters of vengeance the doom of nations—shall we disport ourselves in the revels of guilty pleasure—and slumber securely on the couch of sin, whilst the crash of Almighty vengeance thunders

ders all around?—If such be our insensibility—then are you, who have stationed yourselves, as the sentinels of religion, called on to exert a tenfold vigilance—to sound in our ears, the ruin that awaits us—to rouse us from the deadly trance—and to gird us with the armour of salvation.

Upon the whole, my fellow Christians, if ever there was a time, when your exertions, and the exertions of all good men were indispensable, it is the present—in an age, which, infected with the vanities of reason, and intoxicated with the pride of philosophy, affects to deride the great truths of Christ's holy religion, and mock at the sublime mysteries of our redemption—at a day, when a spirit of wild licentiousness, claiming the name of *liberality*, sweeps away all distinctions, and mixes all extremes—when religious sentiment is stigmatized as prejudice, and the simplicity of God's sacred word is branded with the name of folly—when the refinements of what is called *civilization* have *frittered* away the boundaries of right and wrong—and the speculative corruptions of the understanding, communicating their depravity to the heart, have spread their pollutions through every channel

channel of the community—when we see the functions of the highest names, confirming examples of irreligion, and creating a fashion, that rapidly circulates their vices through every class, and shoots the poison of their crimes, through every member of the public body—until at last, the fatal lesson has returned upon themselves; and those, whom they had taught to disrespect their God, have learned to despise their *governors*—when the support of the laws, has become a mark for popular revenge—when assassination has been reduced to *system*—when the furious spirit of innovation has gone abroad—and treason has not feared to rear its head in our very streets—when interest, and ambition, and voluptuousness have every where set up their idols—and the *only* temple, in which the boasted wisdom of the present day, refuses to bend the knee, is THE TEMPLE OF THE LIVING GOD—when these things are so, surely we are called on, as if a voice from heaven had warned us, to arm ourselves against these abominations—these are evidently the provocations, and preparatives to those last heavy judgments, which the wrath of God visits upon abandoned and reprobate nations—and these are the very characters,

racters, whereby those countries, that have been swept with the besom of desolation, have been ruinously distinguished, in the period immediately preceding their extinction.

Having thus shewn, that there exists a *necessity* for the exertions of all, who regard private happiness, or public prosperity ; it remains to be considered, what are the MEANS, most likely to render those exertions successful—and what means could have been devised, more efficacious than those, which you, my brethren, have adopted?—to strip vice of the sanctions of fashion—to tear off the mask of infidelity—to inculcate the principles of religion, by your instructions—and to exhibit the loveliness of virtue, in your practice—for these purposes you have united ; and to effect these great objects, you have multiplied your individual strength, by the energies of associated zeal.—You are not indeed armed with the power of the magistrate ; nor do you carry with you, the warrant of ecclesiastical commission—but secured, at the same time, against those jealous fears of encroachment, that oppose the one—and the suspicion of self-interest, which injures the utility of the other
—you

—you possess in your numbers, and your cause, every enforcement of authority, and every title to respect—in the prosecution of your plans, you have been favoured with the co-operation of our GOVERNORS; because they well knew, that the best interests of government must be co-extended with the diffusion of religion—the earnest concurrence of the CLERGY, you could not but have received—your cause, and theirs are the same—you have the hearts of all *good* men with you—you have the judgments of all *wise* men in your favour—every *intelligent selfishness* must be interested for the prosperity of your institution—with these advantages, with an advantage that far exceeds all, the approbation of that great Being, in whose cause you are enrolled, you have every assurance of success—in the magnitude of the abuses, which you have combined to combat, you have every demand for your exertion.

The *specific* measures of reform, which your collective wisdom has suggested, it is not my purpose to detail—time will not permit the enumeration—and the full, and able discussion they have already received, from my pre-

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deceffors in this ftation, muft render it unnecessary—I fhall therefore detain your attention, only by fuch particulars, as may deferve peculiar notice.

IGNORANCE, your Affociation has rightly judged the moft fertile fource, of all moral and political diforder—with regret they faw, at the firft moment of their formation, that amongft the lower orders of our countrymen, it had taken deep, and extenfive root—they had feen it, in their perfonal intercourse—they difcovered it, with ftill more formidable certainty, in the destructiveness of its effects—againft this great national evil therefore, were directed their earlieft efforts—and to promote the religious education of the children of the poor, became one of the *firft* objects to which their energies were applied.

What were the falutary expedients, and judicious modes of encouragement adopted, to carry this purpofe into effect, has been on a former occafion publicly ftated—it is only neceffary for me to add, that the effect has hitherto been fully anfwerable to the moft fanguine expectation:—and that fo far as the
operation

operation of these means has hitherto been extended, their efficacy has been abundantly evinced, by the emulation, that has been excited—the desire of knowledge, that has been diffused—and the actual attainments, that have been made. One point however there is, connected with the subject, to which my duty requires me to advert. Some there are, to whom the instruction of the lower orders appears in a light, far from beneficial—and who consider the partial cultivation, to which, from the nature of their situation, they must necessarily be confined, as tending to render them dissatisfied with their condition, and exposing them to the insidious suggestions of the infidel, and the seditious—by enabling them to peruse those writings, which are daily circulated for their delusion—and which being artfully adjusted, to the standard of their ignorance, and their passions, easily find amongst them eager, and tumultuous advocates—whilst on the other hand, the dictates of true wisdom, and practical prudence, necessarily addressing themselves to just principles of reasoning, and an unbiassed feeling of right, are in vain offered in confutation. In answer to this, I will not urge, that the very argument, which is here advanced against

the intellectual improvements of the poor, derives its sole support from the abuses, that grow out of a deficiency of knowledge—I will not urge, that ignorance is an unsafe ground, for authority to rest on; and that with the same facility, with which it crouches to *power*, it may be made to minister to *faction*—I will not urge, that whatever conduces to the true interests of mankind, can have a solid foundation, only in that knowledge, which can *discern* those interests—I will not urge, that in a neighbouring country * where instruction has been spread almost universally amongst the lowest class, the blessings of industry, good order, and religious principle, have been found singularly to prevail—these, and other considerations on the same head, I shall not *now* press upon your reflexion—since the objection, whatever may be its weight, cannot with justice be applied to the proceedings of the Association—had, indeed, the scheme of education originated with them, and had that scheme been

* The reader need scarcely be informed that the country here alluded to is Scotland—in which it is well known that decent demeanour, as well as superior intelligence, distinguishes the lower classes above those of any other part of the British empire. In no part of the world, perhaps, has education been more extended—and no where has there appeared more general industry, and regularity.

confined to the communication of the bare elements of learning, without any of their more useful combinations, your institution might have been chargeable, with the injurious consequences, supposed to follow—but when on the contrary, your part has been, to direct the course of literary instruction, already established, to the most valuable objects; and to furnish the material for the highest mental improvement, none but the *benefits* of the system can be ascribed to you, whatever, under other circumstances, may be its disadvantages.

The knowledge, which it has been your great ambition to disseminate, is the knowledge of religion—and to this end, what means more happily suited, than those you have employed? In the address of last year, it was announced that a plan was then in contemplation, for the distribution of bibles amongst the lower classes—the number of bibles to amount to 5000—to be sold at a reduced price—and to be distributed amongst Christians of all denominations, without distinction. I am happy now to inform you, that this plan has been carried into effect—the number proposed
has

has been contracted for—the greater part actually procured, and circulated—and although the sum, presented by the benevolent author of this scheme, amounted only to 50*l.* and not less than 1600*l.* were requisite for its completion, yet so warmly has the beneficence of the original donor been seconded by the liberality of the public, that the Association has been encouraged to carry the plan yet farther, and to annex to it a scheme, for sending into circulation a large number of testaments, for the more constant use of the younger parts of families—the speedy accomplishment of which, there is every reason to expect ; as a large proportion of those, on whom this cause of religion and humanity furnishes the strongest claims, yet remain to contribute their assistance—but may it not be hoped, that this scheme may be carried to a yet greater extent ? Nay, may it not be hoped, that the continually growing benefits of its operation, may at length place it upon a foundation, independent of individual munificence—and that the same superintending care, that provides for the peasant a *place* in which to worship his Creator ; may also secure to him that invaluable book, which alone can teach him, in *what manner* he

is to be worshipped? Mean time, what *has* been accomplished, must afford to every friend of virtue, the highest satisfaction—it goes at the same time, to evince the efficacy of your exertions, and to confirm this truth—that no good cause, taken up with zeal, and maintained with perseverance, can fail of ultimate success.

But excellent as this work has been, your Association has not rested here—it was not enough, that the great truths of revelation should be placed before the eyes of the people; it was necessary, that they should be read, and relished. The books hitherto in use amongst the lower classes of our countrymen have been such as, falling in with their ignorance, and their vices, could not but excite a distaste, and even incapacity for every thing serious and instructive—to correct this false taste, and to create a relish for more wholesome nourishment, was an object worthy of your notice—for this purpose, you have wisely devised the scheme, of sending abroad through the vendors of cheap books intended for the use of the poor, small tracts, in which the principles of moral rectitude, and religious truth, are conveyed

conveyed in the attractive form of *fable*—thus interesting curiosity in behalf of virtue, and blending with the entertainment of the fancy the correction of the heart. By this means, moral truths become insensibly impressed upon the mind—the more serious, and useful concerns of life, are raised to their due importance—and whilst the general cause of virtue thus receives additional support, a taste and knowledge are diffused, that form the necessary preparatives, for the profitable perusal of the great volume of our salvation.

“The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light”—and with them, we find, had originated this plan of popular instruction—they had dealt out their lessons, in the most compendious form—and by their unhappy zeal, in the service of *their* master, they had contrived, that every cottager should be supplied, with a cheap, and portable system of impiety. Without some counteraction, what must be the consequence? Whilst the enemy had thus over-run the low grounds of society, was the supporter of Christianity to remain within his strong holds, and boast of his strength in fastnesses,

fastnesses, which gave no command; and in armour, which was too cumbrous for action?—No—we have learned wisdom, from the foes of religion—we have armed ourselves with weapons, fit for the encounter—and under the blessing of that great Being, who looks down with favour, upon every effort in the cause of virtue, we *will* be successful. How far we have already succeeded, may be inferred from the prodigious number of the tracts alluded to, which have been actually dispersed—amounting to not less than 100,000, in the space of the last twelve months—and it deserves to be remarked, that these have not been scattered *gratuitously*—in which case, they might have fallen in popular estimation, and would furnish no ground from their *consumption*, whereon to estimate the degree of their *demand*.

What may be the benefits resulting from the prosecution of this plan, it must be difficult to compute—may we not naturally expect, that it will work an entire change, in the manners of our populace?—when books, inculcating lessons of industry, and virtue, and religion, are made to form the amusement of the
Old,

Old, and the instruction of the Young—may we not expect, that though the obduracy of matured habits should resist the salutary impression, yet the rising generation will grow up, under its influence—and that the feeling of utility, and the principle of right, will at length take place of that slovenly indolence, that improvident thoughtlessness, and that too prevalent disregard of honesty and truth, which have hitherto marked the lower classes of our people?

But here I cannot help observing that in order to secure these invaluable consequences, the scheme must be prosecuted with a vigour and extension suited to the exigence. I have mentioned the number already dispersed—and considering the lateness of the commencement, it is a large one—but still “what is this “amongst so many”—this would, at the most moderate computation, amount but to a single tract to every five families through the kingdom—to attain the desired end they must be sent abroad, through every county, and town, and village, where there are any who can read—and in order to this there must be a vastly larger fund than the Association, engaged in so many

many other expensive undertakings, can possibly supply—and every man of station, of influence and virtue, must become an active assistant in dispersing them—this, I scruple not to say—would produce an infallible effect—and let me add, that it is every person's concern, who values life, or liberty, or property—who loves his country, or who honours his God.

But whilst you were thus engaged, in providing for the spiritual wants of your poorer brethren, you were not unmindful of their temporal necessities—and you thought it not unworthy of you, in the late season of threatened scarcity and distress, to employ your talents, and your knowledge, in communicating whatever information, your experience, or your reading might suggest, as to the modes, by which a cheap, and easy subsistence might be procured.

Nor have you confined yourselves to such publications, as were suited, only to the occasions of the *poor*—to have alleviated their present wants—to have taught them the value of cleanliness, and industry, and honesty, and truth

truth—to have instilled into their minds, the notion of utility, and the sense of religion—to have thus prepared them for the profitable perusal of the holy scripture—and to have supplied them with that sacred book, for their final edification—these were objects worthy of your institution—and yet there remained a species of publication, whose object was too important to escape your discernment; and whose benefits should reach, not merely to the peasant, but to him of less humble rank, and less limited attainments.—The late growth of infidel writings, assuming a new shape, and decking themselves in all the colours of popular allurements, required a speedy counteraction—to this end, it was deemed expedient, to send into general circulation, such treatises as might most intelligibly, and at the same time briefly, vindicate Christianity from the malignant attacks of its adversaries. With a prudence, which well became your wisdom, you determined not to anticipate the notoriety of those pernicious publications, by the precipitancy of reply—and that their unhappy celebrity should not be hastened, but followed by their confutation—well knowing also, that the Christian faith had little to fear, from the powers

powers of reasoning, displayed in such performances—and that the *true* cause of their adoption, was to be sought in the *predisposition* of the public mind, from an ignorance of the sacred word, and an impatience of its restraints—you, with equal prudence, resolved, that however the urgency of the occasion might draw from you, argumentative replies; on these, you were by no means to rely, as your only, or even your principal strength—the general dissemination of the scriptures, and the religious education of youth, you rightly judged the truly efficacious mode of defence.

But as it has been peculiarly the policy of modern infidels, to strip religion of its sanctity, and to degrade the sacred books, by heaping on them every epithet of scurrility, and contempt—it appeared to you, that it might not be unprofitable, to meet the enemy on this very ground—and as the labours of certain worthy persons, both in this and the neighbouring country, afforded you as hopeful means of accomplishing this object, as you could reasonably expect—you very properly availed yourselves of what they had done—
and

and by printing cheap editions of tracts, both tending to establish the evidences of Revelation in general, and to repel the particular attacks which have been lately made upon it, by that well-known writer, who has even vulgarized infidelity, so as to fit it for the taste and comprehension of the very rabble—you have sent useful antidotes through the land, and have put them within the reach of him who can afford to spare but the merest trifle. It may be hoped, that the exertions of individual members will carry on the merciful work (in the promoting of which some of them * have already shewn so exemplary a zeal) and by giving them *gratis* to those who have nothing to pay, make provision, that even the meanest peasant may be able, according to the apostolic direction, to give a reason of the hope that is in him. But on this head, you have, indeed, an ample field. When you find one of the redoubted champions of infidelity, boldly contending, that man is capable of arriving at

* Particularly the Lord Bishop of Elphin, at whose sole expence a most useful compendium of the evidences of the Christian religion, extracted from *Seed*, *Watson*, and *Paley*, has lately been published—to be distributed by the Association.

absolute perfection, in this present life, for which alone he is destined—and that the day is fast approaching, when the whole human race, having attained that glorious state, shall exult in unbounded freedom; knowing no law, and restrained by no government, but that of individual reason—from the commencement of which happy æra, the extinction of the passions is to *perpetuate* this perishable frame, and *human immortality* to crown the work.—When you find another, with greater moderation, admitting the existence of what he calls a God, but denying him the power of communicating with his creatures—and whilst he rejects the written word, as not suited to the *simplicity* of the unlearned; sending him to the abstract contemplation of the physical, and moral world, for the *intuitive* knowledge of his Creator, and his duty—when, I say, we find the adversaries of our faith, seriously contending for these frenzies—and contending for them, as *essential* parts of their respective systems; could we refrain from smiling at such extravagant follies, were we not grieved to see, that there are fools, who can embrace even these absurdities, because they carry, to the corrupt

corrupt affections, a release from the restraints of virtue, and the terrors of religion?

But to return—whilst you have been thus zealous, in disseminating such works, as might conduce to the instruction, and improvement, of the public mind—you have been not unprofitably employed, in suppressing many that were *injurious*—to your vigilant interference do we owe it, that publications offensive to decency, and destructive of morals, are no longer openly vended—and to you are our Youth indebted, for rescuing them from that odious familiarity with vice, which fixes, in a polluted imagination, the basis of every thing, that is unprincipled, and dissolute.

Hitherto, I have confined myself, to a view of the exertions of the Association, as directed to the reformation of *principle*—if I have dwelt rather largely upon this topic, I have to seek my excuse, in the general importance of the subject—and I look particularly for *your* indulgence, as the measures to which I have alluded, being almost all of recent growth, prove that your operations are *progressive*—and that in such cases, as depend *solely* upon the Association

Association itself, and in which they are not merely to *recommend*, but to *act*, the work of virtue is not permitted to linger.

But let it not be supposed, that occupied as you have been, in plans for the reformation of *principle*, you have in any degree neglected those, that tend to the reformation of *practice*—no—the violation of the sabbath—the prevalence of the horrid crime of perjury—the mischiefs of lottery insurance—the gross abuse of spirituous liquors amongst the lower orders—these, and the other flagitious practices, that openly disgrace society, are the unceasing objects of your deliberation, and your hostility—but the different plans, which your wisdom has suggested, for the removal of these evils, have been already so amply detailed; that to the public, nothing remains to be added for information; and to you, nothing more can be needful, than to urge a persevering exertion for their accomplishment.

Upon the whole, my brethren, great have been your efforts, in the glorious cause you have undertaken—and not inconsiderable has been your success—but to crown these efforts,

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and to complete their success, there is one thing indispensable—I mean EXAMPLE—this is, I may say, the very *soul* of your institution—this alone it is, that can give life, and efficacy to your resolves—without this, all your regulations become dead letter—and your Association, sunk into merited contempt, and put aside as an impertinent intruder, will only serve to furnish matter of derision and triumph to the enemies of our religion; whilst to the friends of virtue, it must raise insuperable obstructions to any future attempt of a similar nature.—Much then does it behove you, my brethren, to beware, that your practice war not with your professions.—Remember that you are as a city that is set upon a hill, and “cannot be hid”—remember, that you have *voluntarily* placed yourselves on that eminence—that you have *challenged* public observation—and taught the world to look to *your* lives and conduct, for a proof of the excellence of that religion, by which you profess to be influenced—remember then, that *every* instance of your personal misconduct, is a wound to Christianity—and that, by evincing the inefficacy of the gospel, upon the morals of its most ostensible advocates, you turn

Traitor

Traitor to its Divine Author—and, like the perfidious disciple, deliver up the Lord of Life, into the hands of his murderers.

Let us then, my brethren, as we value the well-being of society, as we value the interests of religion, as we value our own eternal welfare—let us seriously consider the excellence of this our work, and the ruin of which its failure must occasion—let us remember, that whether our efforts for the reformation of others prove prosperous or ineffectual, we have taken upon ourselves this sacred obligation—that “as for us,” we and our “house will serve the Lord”—and let us humbly implore that God, without whom the strength of the mighty, and the counsels of the wise, are vain, to vouchsafe to us his assistance and protection, his guidance and his blessing—so that, in all our works begun, continued and ended in Him, we may glorify his holy name—and finally, through his mercy obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.—

F I N I S

A P P E N D I X.

IT may not be amiss to state, for the information of those members of the Association, whose general residence in the country prevents their attendance at the meetings of the Association, a few particulars concerning the progress and present state of the principle objects of their exertions for the advancement of the Knowledge and Practice of Religion and Virtue, amongst which the scheme for the

DISSEMINATION of the HOLY SCRIPTURES

is eminently entitled to the first place.

The Dissemination of the Holy Scriptures has gone on with rapidity and spirit, and every bible of 4500 (which were all that could be procured from Messrs. Rivington, London, being their whole stock) would have been disposed of long since, if the subscribers had not found it prudent to abate in their exertions, and leave a few hundreds to answer the demands of those who might offer new subscriptions. If such persons were to be told that the stipulated number was sold off, they might consider this as a discontinuance, if not an end, of the scheme: whereas, having 500, or thereabouts, on hands, the members of the Association are enabled to keep this excellent measure afloat, and hope to pursue it hereafter through every possible stage of advance and improvement, of which it is capable.

At present, the prosecution of the scheme is retarded by a wish to keep their money at home, and to find, if it can be done without inconvenience, a sufficient supply of Bibles from a new impression in their own country, which they don't yet give up; though the well-known scarcity of printing paper, and the extravagant advanced price upon it in Ireland, give them much discouragement, and at all events great delay: and delay is known to be unfavourable to the success of even the best works, when they require zeal, spirit and exertion.

The same causes have also postponed a renewed application to the public at large, particularly to the Nobility, to the greater part of the Gentry, to very many of the beneficed Clergy, and, what they hope will be a most productive source of contribution, to the Irish Absentees in England.

In a work of so great magnitude, but of no less public utility, should they find themselves under a necessity even of imploring the aid of the legislature, the Association think they may entertain an humble hope of success from the examples of piety and munificence, that have been given session after session by grants of 5000*l.* for building Churches; of which measure the present one for Disseminating the Holy Scriptures, is surely a twin-sister.

At all events, through whatever means it may be brought to pass, the Association, under the blessing of God's Providence, will never despair of success at the last, nor relinquish those hopes which in their first address they held forth to the public—**“ THAT EFFECTUAL PROVISION WOULD BE MADE, THAT NO HOUSE, NO CABBIN IN THE WHOLE KINGDOM, IN WHICH THERE IS A SINGLE PERSON WHO CAN READ, SHALL BE DESTITUTE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.”**

RELI-

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

Similar to the foregoing measure in importance and utility, is the Religious Education of Youth, which the Association, among its earliest exertions in the cause of religion, endeavoured to advance, by establishing Annual Examinations in the principles of the Christian Religion, of the children educated in the parochial schools, and other charitable seminaries in this city and its vicinity, with suitable premiums to the best answerers.

To extend the advantages of this measure as much as possible, the Association made it a condition to entitle a child to be a candidate at these examinations, that he or she should produce a certificate that, having been previously examined in their respective school with ten others, he or she was the best answerer. The happy effects of this establishment for promoting Christian Knowledge, have exceeded the most sanguine expectations, by exciting an uncommon ardour, not only among the children themselves, but likewise among their teachers.

At the last examinations no fewer than 234 candidates appeared, whose proficiency in Christian knowledge afforded the highest satisfaction to the examiners and to the audience, and reflected singular credit on their teachers.

The whole number of children who underwent a previous preparation for this examination must have been not fewer than 2340.

The Association, convinced of the inestimable advantages resulting from this measure by three years experience, and desirous to extend such examinations through the kingdom, have appropriated 200 large octavo bibles, to be furnished to such of their clerical members as shall first claim them on paying 3s. 3d. each for them, and any number that may be required

quired of handsome medals at 1s. 1d. to be given in premiums at similar examinations in the country.

MORAL INSTRUCTION.

The pernicious tendency of most of the cheap publications, commonly entitled story books and ballads, which formerly constituted almost the whole of the literary entertainment of the lower classes, suggested to a most worthy and respectable member of the Association the idea of an attempt to destroy this source of corruption, and to substitute in its place such small tracts as might at once amuse and entertain the lower class of readers, and at the same time insensibly instil into their hitherto untutored minds Moral Instruction, by representing, under the garb of fable, the happy effects which naturally flow from the observation of the laws of christian morality, and the destructive consequences of their violation.

This idea was zealously adopted by the Association, and directed to be carried into immediate operation by a monthly publication of one or more Tracts, of which twenty-four have already been published. Five thousand of each Tract is printed, which, including a second impression of several of them, amounts to 150,000 Tracts, of which number upwards of 120,000 have been actually dispersed and received by the readers for whom they are calculated with uncommon avidity.

Such a rapid sale at the commencement, merely through the exertions of a very few individuals, when the scheme had to struggle with a pre-occupied market, and with many other difficulties, holds out the fairest prospect of compleat success, when it shall become generally known, and, which may be reasonably hoped, as generally patronized. The advantages of this measure, by disposing the lower classes
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of society to honesty, sobriety, industry, cleanliness and submission to the laws, instead of the contrary vices to which they were accustomed to be stimulated by their former course of reading, are truly incalculable.

One of the principal obstructions which has hitherto occurred to the progress of this measure, has been the difficulty of procuring agents for the dispersion of the Tracts through the kingdom. This difficulty can no way so easily be removed, as by the co-operation of the gentry and clergy, by supplying shopkeepers, hawkers and pedlars, in their respective vicinities, with an assortment of these tracts for sale; which may be done without much trouble, and at a comparatively small expence.

It must be noticed, that precisely the same measure was adopted, at the same time and without any previous communication, in Great Britain, by that ornament of her sex and of human nature Mrs. Hannah Moore, and by her wonderful zeal and exertions, with the assistance of several other highly respectable persons has been so astonishingly successful, that not fewer than four millions of these small Moral and Entertaining Tracts have been circulated through that kingdom.

REFORM OF THE CRIMINAL POOR.

This Institution has hitherto fully answered the intention of its establishment, so far as the funds for its support have enabled the Committee, to whom the management of the Reform is entrusted, to carry the measure into effect. The first establishment of this Institution was unavoidably attended with very considerable expence for repairs, alterations, and proper furniture of the house to prepare it for the accommodation of the miserable objects for whose reception

tion it was intended : several difficulties likewise occurred before proper objects could be obtained.

These have been now happily surmounted, and there are at present eighteen young persons, viz. two girls and sixteen boys, four of whom are the unhappy offspring of parents who have been either executed or transported, and the remaining fourteen were convicts under sentence of transportation. The boys are all instructed in useful manufactures whereby they may hereafter be enabled to earn an honest livelihood, without being exposed to the temptation of employing illicit means for their support. Two of them are bred tailors under the superintendant, who formerly followed that business, and fourteen are taught shoe-making, by a master employed for the purpose ; and there is a fair prospect that they will soon be able to defray a considerable proportion of their expence by their labour. They are all carefully instructed in the fundamental principles of the Christian religion and morality ; their conduct ever since their reception into the Reform, has been, with very few exceptions, much fewer than might have been reasonably apprehended, irreproachable, and affords the happiest grounds of expectation of their being in due time sent out into the world valuable members of the community, instead of, what must otherwise unavoidably have been their fate, becoming the pests of society, and in the end closing a miserable existence by the forfeiture of their lives to the violated laws of their country.

Receipts and Payments of the Association for
discountenancing Vice, and promoting the
Practice of Religion and Virtue, from
31st March 1795, (when last Account
was published) to 25th July, 1796.

R E C E I P T S.

	£.	s.	d.
Balance in Treasurer's hands, 31st March, 1795	92	18	10
Subscriptions from Members	-	305	19 9
Donation from his Excellency Earl Camden,	}	100	0 0
Lord Lieutenant of Ireland			
Ditto from his Grace the Lord Primate	-	22	15 0
Ditto from Persons not Members	-	20	2 7½
Traacts, Pamphlets and Sermons, sold	-	94	7 6
	£636 3 8½		

P A Y M E N T S.

	£.	s.	d.
Printing the following tracts, &c. saleable to Subscribers at reduced prices.			
2000 Exhortation to the Religious Observance of Good-Friday, by Bishop Porteus, 3d edition			
2000 Serious Exhortation to the Public, 2d edition			
2000 Adams on Confirmation, 2d edition			
2000 Gibson's Advice to the Sick, 2d edition			
2000 Exhortation to Family Prayer, with different Forms annexed, 2d edition	100	4	0½
1000 Hincks's Answer to Paine's Age of Reason			
250 Watson's Apology for the Bible			
1000 Bishop Horne's Discourse on Female Education			
1000 Sermon preached before the Association, by the Rev. Dr. Burrowes, 5th March, 1795			
Printing 55,000 Moral and Entertaining Tracts	106	10	0
Contribution for distributing, at reduced prices, 4000 Testaments	50	0	0
Premiums, and other expences incurred by Catechetical examinations in 1795 and 1796	105	7	6½
Contribution towards the support of the Reform of the Criminal Poor	61	7	6
Contribution towards the support of a school for soldier's children	29	4	8½
Advertising - - -	28	5	6
Printing and Stationary - -	39	4	8
Assistant Secretary and Messengers -	47	15	7
Incidental and petty charges - -	9	15	5½
Balance in Treasurer's hands, 25th July, 1796	58	8	8½
	<u>£. 636</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>8½</u>

WM. WATSON, Jun. Treasurer.

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